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Question Time: Military spending cuts?

Is there any part of the defense budget you would trim?

By Rob Burgess
Tribune night editor

[**Editor's note:** To participate in future queries, keep an eye on our Twitter and Facebook accounts.]

According to the United States Government Publishing Office, total military spending for 2013 came to around \$610 billion; one of the largest chunks of the federal budget, rivaled only by Medicaid, Medicare and Social Security. Several recent news stories have renewed the debate as to whether this money is being spent in the most fiscally prudent manner.

“Unknown to most Americans, the Pentagon has spent \$2.7 billion developing a system of giant radar-equipped blimps to provide an early warning if the country were ever attacked with cruise missiles, drones or other low-flying weapons,” reported David Willman of The Los Angeles Times on Sept. 24.

This program came to the attention of the nation last month after one of these blimps caused a panic.

“State police used shotguns to deflate a wayward military surveillance blimp that broke loose in Maryland and floated for hours before coming down into trees in the Pennsylvania countryside,” reported The Associated Press’ Michael Rubinkam Oct. 29. “State police troopers peppered the blimp with about 100 shots. The slow-moving, unmanned Army surveillance blimp broke loose from its mooring at Aberdeen Proving Ground and then floated over Pennsylvania, causing thousands of electrical outages as its dangling tether took out power lines. The 240-foot helium-filled blimp, which had two fighter jets on its tail, came down near Muncy, a small town about 80 miles north of Harrisburg, the state capital. No injuries were reported.”

Then, a few days later, Sen. John McCain and Sen. Jeff Flake, both Republicans of Arizona, released an oversight report, “Tackling Paid Patriotism.”

“In 2013, a roaring crowd cheered as the Atlanta Falcons welcomed National Guard members who unfurled an American flag across the Georgia Dome’s turf,” began the report, released Wednesday. “Little did those fans — or millions of other Americans — know that the National Guard had actually paid the Atlanta Falcons for this display of patriotism as part of a \$315,000 marketing contract. This unfortunate story is not limited to professional football, but is repeated at other professional and college sporting events around the nation. In fact, these displays of paid patriotism

are included within the \$6.8 million that the Department of Defense has spent on sports marketing contracts since fiscal year 2012.”

According to the report, since 2012:

- \$400,000 has been paid to the Indianapolis Colts by the Indiana Army National Guard, and \$20,000 has been paid by the United States Air Force.
- \$115,000 has been paid to the Indiana Pacers by the IANG.
- \$400,000 has been paid to Learfield Communications (for Indiana University and Purdue University games) by the IANG.

The National Football League has since pledged to repay these funds, yet the damage to their reputation has been done.

So, we wanted to know: “Do you think there is any part of the military's budget that could be trimmed? If so, what would it be and why? If not, why not?”

Your answers

“Unnecessary weapons and less worldwide deployment. Do not reduce salaries of low-ranking soldiers.” — **Glen Edwards Jr.**

“They throw stuff away too much. As for the rest, no! We're turning into the same society that sat by and let Hitler rise to power. Now it's ISIS and

Islamic terrorism. We sit comfortably over here while people are beheaded for believing in God.” — **Sara King**

“Trimmed? No. More like, increased.” — **Donald Clevenger, U.S. Navy veteran**

Our answers

“How about those patriotism initiatives that McCain just detailed? Sneaky advertising is not something I want the DOD spending money on, especially when sending it to sports leagues that don't need the extra cash.” — **Pedro Velazco**

“I'm no expert on federal budgetary matters. My guess is there's probably something that could be cut, but what exactly? I haven't a clue. Perhaps the number of overseas military bases could be reconsidered, or the extent to which research and development is funded. I'd like to see our allies in Europe take a larger part in the overseas operations we now run, rather than the U.S. acting as de facto world police. But any decisions would have to be made after careful thought to long-term consequences both for the U.S. itself and for the world at large.” — **Sarah Einselen**

“It's not even a really a question, it's just a matter of who is willing to say it. No politician wants to be perceived as being anti-military or not serving the interests of their constituents. But, even if you think the spending is fine the way it is, or should be increased, is there no part of you that thinks this

money could at least be spent differently? I look at wasteful programs like these and I think of all the other things we could do with that cash we just set on fire. It's like that old maxim goes: Work smarter, not harder." — **Rob Burgess**

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